

INCREASING DIFFICULTIES OF BOLIVIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENT

The difficulties of General Rene Barrientos' military government are intensifying as time passes and no solutions are found for Bolivia's acute political and economic problems. Moreover, Barrientos' uncertain leadership gives no assurance that prospects for stability will soon improve.

Barrientos' ambition to rule as a popularly elected president has been an important factor behind his government's insecurity. Although well liked by most Bolivians, he has been unable to secure much support for his candidacy from the political parties. Moreover, he is unwilling to give up the junta presidency despite legalities requiring candidates to resign from public office 180 days before elections. As a result of this impasse, Barrientos withdrew his candidacy on 30 April but then moved last week to postpone indefinitely the presidential elections scheduled for 31 October. Barrientos probably engineered the postponement to gain time to consider another strategy by which he might become a constitutional president. This latest move has brought him under renewed criticism from most political parties, but his general popularity seems unaffected.

Bolivia's economic problems are closely tied to the political situation. When the junta first took power last November, it characterized itself as an interim government and promised

sweeping economic reforms as well as a quick return to constitutional government. However, it soon discovered that it lacked the competence to cope effectively with complex economic problems.

The most pressing of these, inherited from the Paz regime, is the ugly situation prevailing in Bolivia's vital tin-mining industry. The tin-mining areas are centers of extreme leftist and Communist influence which have not been controlled by any government since 1952. Moreover, COMIBOL, the state mining corporation, is burdened with managerial irresponsibility as well as unruly labor, and is close to bankruptcy.

International deficit financing has been obtained, but further assistance is predicated on a wide-ranging reform of present mine labor practices which inordinately favor the miners at the expense of efficient production. All attempted reforms have been strongly resisted by the miners acting under their extremist leadership.

Barrientos is aware that the miners can be brought under control only by military action. He has indicated that his government is willing to undertake such an operation, but is moving with deliberation because he is also aware that the miners will probably put up a stubborn defense. The miners are armed, they are fierce fighters, and they are under determined leadership.

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